

# **Clausewitzian Trinity: A Vague Concept or a Tool for The Attack.**

**A Monograph  
by  
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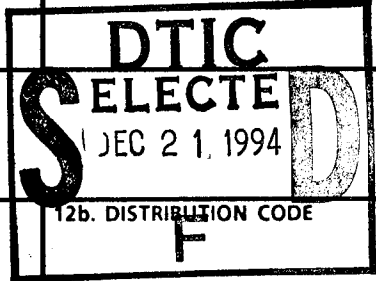
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## ABSTRACT

THE CLAUSEWITZIAN TRINITY: A VAGUE CONCEPT OR A TOOL FOR THE ATTACK by MAJ Jack F. Smith, USA, 49 pages.

This monograph studies the meaning behind the infamous Clausewitzian concept of the trinity. He uses this concept to describe the essence of warfare in book one of his treatise On War. This concept permeates his discussion of warfare throughout the remainder of his book and it is imperative that even a casual student of warfare captures the essence of the trinity if one has any hope of digesting the many facets that face the practitioner of organized violence.

The monograph first goes into an explanation of the trinity using various sources to amplify that what Carl Von Clausewitz was describing drives all the complex interactions of humanity. The essence of the trinity will amplify the common held notions that the levels of war are a continuum and that the execution of warfare is merely an extension of politics.

Finally, we examine how an understanding of the trinity can be a tool for the tactical commander who must execute the attack. A tactical scenario is used to illustrate Clausewitz's basic premise that warfare is never executed in a vacuum. The trinity affects the factors that lead up to the conflict, the movement of troops to the battlefield and the exchanging of bullets into enemy formations. While normally associated with the national level and strategic level of war, the true nature of the trinity affects every organization down to the last member of the squad. Each has a unique trinity that may affect the outcome of the engagement. The commander who can conceptualize the reality and effect of the trinity will go into battle better prepared to execute their mission.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

A division commander receives a mission from corps to conduct a deliberate attack in zone to seize a bridgehead across the Yellow river. The staff immediately begins a mission analysis that encompasses the familiar components of mission, enemy, terrain, troops and time (METT-T) in order to consider the many facets that go into producing a viable five-paragraph operations order. After detailed planning, the division initiates a combined arms attack and experiences mission failure prior to reaching the enemy side of the river. If one were to believe the prevalent understanding of Carl Von Clausewitz's writings, the mission failure is directly attributable to chance because in his writings a nation's army embodies that component of the trinity of war.

In this scenario, the division in question was at war. Since, according to Clausewitz, war has three constituent elements: reason, violence and chance with each embodied in the government, people and army respectively, then it follows that the evaluation of the army's performance rests on the role of chance in the execution of its mission.<sup>1</sup> Intuitively this should not be the case. The most casual observer would argue that the doctrine, equipment, synchronization of assets and intelligence concerning the enemy's disposition have a major impact on the conduct of military operations. If chance is not the only factor that affects warfare, are we therefore to conclude the theorizing of Clausewitz is wrong?

Warfare for the modern military commander embodies concerns ranging from the effects of weapons, operational design, strategic aims to political ramifications of military actions. Theory attempts to coalesce this range of information into a coherent framework. The framework provides a tool from which students of the military craft can organize and apply their trade. Towards this end the United States Army has established doctrine grounded in a basic understanding of theory as elucidated by a series of great military minds. The Army manual, Military Qualifications Standards III; Leader Development Manual for Majors and Lieutenant Colonels, contains a list of such great minds. The first

name mentioned in this manual under Theory of War is the venerable Carl Von Clausewitz.

The synopsis for Clausewitz's book states that it is a "classic study of war" that is a "masterpiece."<sup>2</sup> Anyone even remotely familiar with his book can identify many of his thoughts reiterated in the current FM 100-5. The United States Army Command and General Staff College and the School for Advanced Military Studies attempt to expose all mid-career officers with a basic understanding of Clausewitz's writings. It would follow then that all career military officers should learn the underlying essence of his thoughts in order to understand his influence on modern military doctrine.

Clausewitz's monumental work On War consists of eight separate books addressing aspects of war ranging from theory to practice, from strategy to tactics and from logistics to combined arms battles. He wrote the exhaustive work over two decades and only had time to revise completely Book One.<sup>3</sup> Luckily, Book One is the focus of my study because it is in Book One that he presents the definition of war and lays the framework for the concept of the trinity. Clausewitz uses this framework to describe complex interactions found in engagements, battles, the purpose of war and other such relevant topics that form a critical piece of current thought for the modern military student.

Clausewitz observed the very same phenomena that challenge the modern military officer. He experienced regional conflicts and continental wars that expanded to include parts of the entire known world. For over three decades of his life he saw the fall and birth of nations and the march of conquering armies on a scale that is massive even in 20th century standards. After observing these epic events, he attempted to write a comprehensive work to understand the essence of war.

Toward this end he begins his treatise with an effort to answer the question; "What is War?".<sup>4</sup> This question has extreme relevance today. Our current doctrine describes a spectrum of military operations. This spectrum requires the military to execute nuclear war, conventional war, peacemaking, peacekeeping, peace enforcement, strikes, raids, anti-terrorism, etc.<sup>5</sup> The first two

falls under the heading of "war". The remaining list fall under a new doctrinal category called "operations other than war."

It appears that the line in FM 100-5 that delineates between war and operations other than war is an official declaration of war. Most would agree that this narrow definition of war falls far short of a conceptual approach to the reality of war. For those involved in exchanging gunfire during operations in Grenada, Panama, the Persian Gulf and most recently Somalia, there was no need to have an edict of Congressional legislation to conceptualize warfare. Yet according to the rigorous application of doctrine, those combatants were not at war.

Politically and diplomatically, one understands why our doctrine has such a narrow definition. The United States Constitution is very specific concerning the provision that only Congress can declare war. While this explains the narrow definition found in doctrine, this realization does little to help the military mind to come to grips with what is the real definition of war.

Clausewitz states categorically that; "war is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."<sup>6</sup> This broader definition allows one to include operations like those in Grenada, Panama, the Persian Gulf and Somalia. Each of these military operations saw one party attempt to force another to do their will. One can readily see that armed warships placed off the coast of a nation in an effort to display a level of political, diplomatic and military resolve would also fall under the purview of Clausewitz's definition of war. Current doctrine would never discuss deterrence or efforts to force international compliance in terms of war. Intellectually, we see that these types of operations fall under Clausewitz's definition of war. In essence, his definition of war is inclusive of any use of military force that compels our adversary to do our will. This is the first step to understanding the essence of warfare.

We now have a simple definition provided by Clausewitz that allows for the categorizing of most military events under the umbrella of war. But this simple definition is not enough. With the advent of technology, weapons of mass destruction, global wars, regional conflicts, insurgency, and so forth, this simple definition of war is inadequate for the military student to understand his profession.



Clausewitz's himself felt that knowing what war was physically was not enough. To understand war, one must grasp the underlying essence of war. What constituent parts form its characteristics and how do these characteristics change.

With a proper understanding of the essence of warfare, one no longer has to grapple with the difference between war and operations other than war. One no longer has to discern, except in a pedantic way, at what level--strategic, operational or tactical--a military action finds as its purpose. One only has to come to grips with the dominant tendencies of war.

These dominant tendencies are analogous to the constituent elements of a molecule. Once you define the constituent parts you can determine the whole. This analogy, if understood, can assist us in weeding through the maze of doctrine that addresses low-intensity, mid-intensity and high-intensity conflict. The seemingly endless reams of doctrine that attempts to differentiate between joint, coalition, combined, counterinsurgency, strategic, operational and tactical warfare can be brought into focus if we can grasp the commonalties found amongst each "molecule."

Finally, an understanding of the constituent parts of war can provide a tool that provides meaning to the apparent endless tactics, techniques and procedures that describe all of the required efforts to use combined arms to a common purpose, in the attack or defense. Vague concepts such as suppression, obscuration, supporting and main effort, deception, deep, close and rear operations possess a new meaning that comes into focus during the overall execution of operations.

Clausewitz defines the constituent parts of warfare as dominant tendencies composed of primordial violence, the play of chance and policy.<sup>7</sup> The current interpretation of these constituent elements is worthy of review as it sheds light on the Army's understanding of war.

## II. THE CURRENT THOUGHT ON THE CLAUSEWITZIAN TRINITY

### A. The School House

In an effort to define war, Clausewitz comes to the conclusion that war is a paradoxical trinity. This trinity has three tendencies as its constituent parts: violence, chance and policy. For purposes of discussion Clausewitz applied something tangible to each element of his trinity. He stated that each element of the trinity in turn "mainly concerns" the government, people and army respectively.<sup>8</sup>

It is at this point that confusion about the essence of his thought occurs. Since the trinity denotes the number three, the requisite triangle comes immediately to mind and Figure 1 is hastily drawn with the government at the apex, and the people and the army at the lower corners.<sup>9</sup>

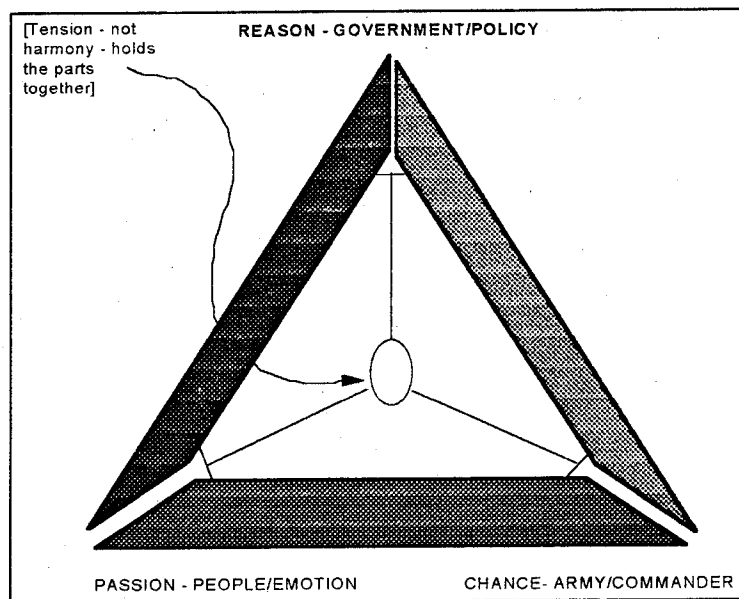


Figure 1. The school-house depiction of the trinity.

This picture and description of the trinity immediately promotes error in the original concept that Clausewitz was attempting to establish. Teachings at the Command and General Staff College use this triangle to try to explain insurgency, coup d'etat, revolution and civil war. The premise of the instruction begins with

each corner of the triangle in equilibrium. Then a crisis develops and one or more corners of the triangle lose equilibrium resulting in the particular phenomena under study.

For example, during instruction on insurgencies, the lesson discussion centers on a portion of the people becoming disenchanted. These people aspire to conduct operations against the government with the goal of placing themselves at the apex of the triangle (Figure 2). During a Coup d'état, the military conducts operations that take a path along its side of the triangle in an effort to place its elements at the apex of the triangle (Figure 3). During a revolution, a larger portion of the people arm themselves and simultaneously attacks the government and army corners of the triangle (Figure 4). Finally, during a civil war the rebelling party forms a new government, its own army and behold two triangles now clash for supremacy (Figure 5).<sup>10</sup> Additional discussions arise concerning the effect of technology and the media on conflict. Many students feel that impact of these influences on modern warfare is so significant that they have become a part of the trinity. The obvious implication is that Clausewitz's trinity formulated in the 18th century is no longer useful for modern considerations.

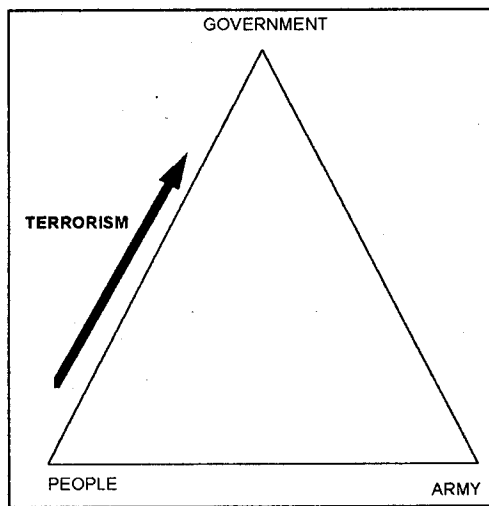


Figure 2. The insurrection.

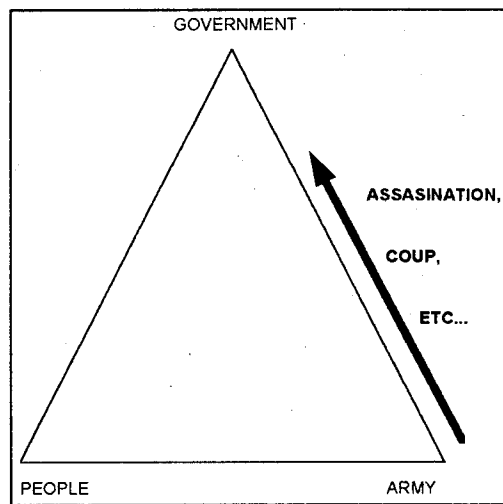


Figure 3. The coup d'etat

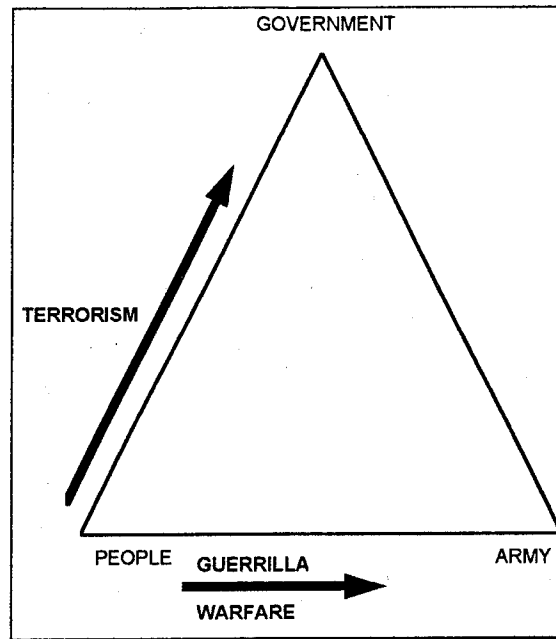


Figure 4. The revolution.

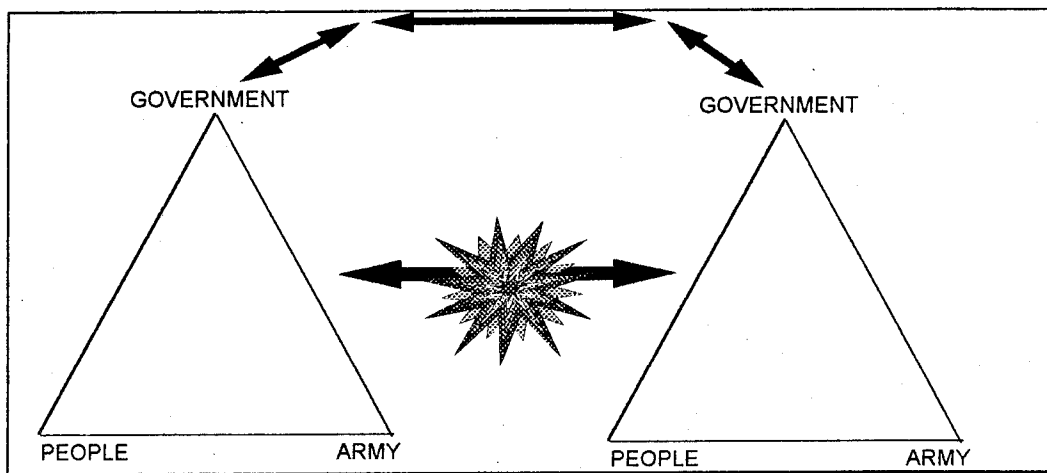


Figure 5. The civil war.

In Major Michael Barbero's monograph on the Iran-Iraq war he evaluates the conflict based on the school-house model of the trinity. He uses the school's interpretation of the trinity to "analyze each antagonist's strategic development during the course of the war."<sup>11</sup> During his presentation he speaks of relative shifts in the dominance of the each corner of the triangle that results in shifting strategic conditions during execution of the war. During one phase of the war he

speaks of the government's rise to prominence in the Iranian trinity caused a military stalemate.<sup>12</sup>

While on the macro level this pedantic discussion might be useful, the cause of a military stalemate involves many more factors than just a dominant government. On the contrary, the presence of a dominant government is usually desired for the prosecution of a war. One would more appropriately, I think, refer to the basic meaning of the trinity and state the change in a different manner.

The Islamic revolution gave the government power through the religious passion of the people. Meanwhile, the government purged the military of those who did not possess the same convictions. These purges sapped the army of its strength. The remaining military leadership became cautious due to fear of the government's reaction if they did anything contrary to the religious movement. Increased combat losses forced the army to resort to their only remaining source of strength, human waves driven by religious fanaticism. We see then that a government policy flamed by the passions of the people affected army tactics. Poor morale coupled with ineffective leadership, produced poor execution and in some cases stalemate.

In this specific example we see a poor analysis of the cause of a military stalemate on the battlefield. An analysis using the triangle model isolated the government from the people and the army. If we use the dominant tendencies of the trinity we see that the people's passion affected government policy. This policy in turn affected the military which changed its tactics to take advantage of the changing circumstances. Dominance by the government is a non-issue. Clausewitz is very specific in his position that, "War is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument."<sup>13</sup> An analysis using Clausewitz's basic trinity shows that a dominant government was not the cause of the stalemate, but actually it was a complex interaction of events and forces driven by a failure in government policy.

The inadequacy of using the triangle for a trinity model becomes apparent when one analyzes each corner of the triangle as a separate entity. With the corner separated by the sides of the triangle, the school-house usually considers each in

isolation. Returning to Clausewitz's basic constituent parts of the trinity, the triangle model would lead us to the following observations: With chance assigned as the dominant tendency to the army, then passion or reason plays no role in the army. With the assignment of policy and reason to government, then chance has no role in the functioning of governments. Finally, with violence and passion the purview of the people, then people must act without reason.

Each of these observations must be wrong. The remainder of this work will present an interpretation of the trinity that allows more elements than just chance to influence the army. The people act under more influences than simply passion and the government is not the sole possessor of reason. More importantly, an appropriate analysis of the trinity will help explain the complexities of human interactions. The guidance and manifestation of human interactions by those forces help us understand and explain how and why men fight. With this basic understanding of the forces at play in war, we can then use this knowledge to help us understand how both our forces and the enemy's forces conduct war. By extension, we can then use the Clausewitzian trinity as a framework determining how to achieve a military objective.

#### B. Doctrine and the Nature of War

Current Army and other sister service doctrine make a cursory attempt to address the nature of war. The title of the last chapter in FM 100-5 is "The Environment of Combat." The chapter states that there are two dimensions of combat worthy of consideration. Those dimensions are the human and the physical dimension.<sup>14</sup>

Physiological, psychological and ethical components make up the human dimension according to FM 100-5. The former deals with the physical conditioning of man, the second the mental status of man and the latter the need to be able to distinguish between right and wrong on the battlefield.

FM 100-5 addresses the physical component of war in terms of the surroundings. Terrain, weather, geography and existing infrastructure form an important component of the METT-T analysis tool and encompasses many

concerns that military leaders must address in the planning and conduct of operations.<sup>15</sup>

These doctrinal dimensions, while useful, do not adequately portray the true nature of war. If one considers my initial scenario with the division attack to conduct a river crossing, one may identify other factors that affected the division mission. The division staff may well have understood the physical environment in which they were executing their mission. The unit conducted proper reconnaissance of the avenues of approach, the S-2 had the proper template of the enemy, and the selection of the river crossing site was the best in the region. The division training program prepared the troops for their mission. There must be other components to warfare that can influence military missions that Chapter 14 of FM 100-5 does not address.

If we return to Clausewitz's trinity we see that the human dimension of combat in FM 100-5 is almost analogous to the passion tendency. The factors that effect the human dimension of war play an integral part in the drive of individual soldiers, units and nations to control and apply organized violence. The physical dimension of war is almost analogous chance in the trinity but it too is not all inclusive. The role of the enemy and the myriad of moving parts on the battlefield form an overwhelming major component of chance. The weather, terrain, geography and infrastructure can be near perfect for the conduct of offensive operations, yet chance can rear its ugly head to disrupt even the most coordinated attack. Chance, a very real dimension of combat, is missing in FM 100-5.

The third component of the trinity is the role of reason. FM 100-5 takes a disjointed look at reason's play on the conduct of military operations. While the first chapter addresses the link from strategic policy through operational to the tactical level of war, there is reason for actions beyond policy on the battlefield. Higher commanders and staff assign missions and derive intent specifically to address the why (i.e., reason) of a particular operation. Most important for consideration is the reason that drives the enemy to fight. There are national characteristics and the circumstances that will drive the enemy to organize and conduct operations in a particular manner. The planning and execution of military

operations must take this into consideration. Forces look to doctrine to provide a baseline of reason for tactics, techniques and procedures used by military forces in the conduct of operations.

In Air Force Manual 1-1, Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force, Essay F addresses the characteristics of war. The essay describes war according to intent, level of effort, level of intensity, types of alliances, and weaponry used.<sup>16</sup> While this discussion may be useful in an effort to categorize the war, it does little to instruct us on the nature of war itself.

The Marine Corps manual FMFM 1-1 provides perhaps the best inspection of the true nature of war. Chapter 1 discusses the effects of friction, uncertainty, fluidity, disorder, the human dimension, violence and danger, and the role of moral and physical forces on war fighting.<sup>17</sup> This chapter provides a good baseline for development of doctrine that can address the true environment found on the modern battlefield. Only through understanding the real environment of war can one properly assess warfare in its entirety. The environment of war provides the context for the events that are studied in history and for those events that we must prepare for the future.

We found that existing doctrine has varying degrees of success in describing the nature of war. These attempts are lacking because they fail to properly portray the true nature of war. Perhaps a look at how doctrine classifies the levels of war can help us.

### C. Doctrine and the Levels of War

Our doctrine tells us that there are three levels of war, namely strategic, operational and tactical.<sup>18</sup> The doctrine goes on to provide a definition for each and a rule of thumb for where one can find a particular level of war. Yet we know that these levels of war are inexact at best. Colonel John A. Warden warns us in his book, The Air Campaign, of the futility of arbitrarily dividing the levels of war.

"Operations from the lowest level to the highest are on a continuum and it serves us poorly to compartment them in such a way that we lose sight of their interrelations."<sup>19</sup>



There is a useful pedantic purpose for identifying particular levels of war to help students grasp the breadth and scope of war. However, there exists no definite line between the them. They have no absolute meaning in and of themselves.

The Marine Corps has also recognized this phenomenon. FMFM 1-1 addresses the levels of war by admitting a clear hierarchy of levels that are merged together with no boundaries. The intellectual interpretation of this hierarchy is "one of scale rather than principle."<sup>20</sup> The Marine Corps recognizes the continuum that exists in the levels of war and in their doctrine states that the thread that holds it together is the ends defined by policy. Clausewitz also described an interaction of the strategic and the tactical level of war. He states:

"A change in the nature of tactics will automatically react on strategy. If tactical phenomena differ completely from one case to another, strategic ones must also differ, if they are to remain consistent and logical."<sup>21</sup>

If one is to accept that an operational level of war exists between tactics and strategy, then Clausewitz would simply state that the line that connects the three is continuous. The interrelationship among the three levels is much more important than attempting to arbitrarily assign lines between them.

We found that the doctrinal levels of war are inexact and the ability to discern the separation between them is difficult at best. There must be another means of intellectually conceptualizing the forces which act on war. These forces that act on war are not finite but infinite. One can neither ignore these forces nor confine them to specific levels of war. We must make an in-depth analysis of these forces and will begin with an investigation into Clausewitz's concept of the trinity.

### III. THE TRINITY'S CONSTITUENT PARTS

Passion, reason and chance compose the Clausewitzian trinity. When considered out of context it is easy to consider these three elements in isolation. Yet, Clausewitz felt that there were no absolutes. The construct of his writings is to present a theoretical, absolute condition, then explain the forces that cause the absolute to never exist in reality.<sup>22</sup> Each of these forces interact to construct a framework from which one conceptualize war.

#### A. Reason

One such force that is always acting on warfare is policy. "Policy will permeate all military operations and in so far as their violent nature will admit, it will have a continuous influence on them."<sup>23</sup> But I refer the reader back to what policy actually represents in the trinity. Policy is a product of the government that mainly embodies the tendency of reason in the trinity. What Clausewitz is actually saying is that warfare without reason is nothing but anarchic violence. Since war is an extension of policy, then reason becomes the basis for war. Political reason governs all levels of warfare as the influence of policy permeates the organization.

Yet there is something lacking in this pedantic argument. The squad in an infantry platoon seldom has an opportunity to reflect on geopolitical realities during the conduct of the operations. While they may have many opportunities to question why the government is placing them in harm's way and while they may even feel that their nation's purpose is good, there are many more reasons why those soldiers fight then simply as an extension of government policy.

The government does not provide the only channel of reason to the conduct of operations. The purpose of government is to provide a concise reason or policy for the execution of warfare, but that policy is seldom obvious beyond the strategic and operational levels of war:

Aleksandr A. Svechin, in his book *Strategy*, tells us, "Just as tactics is an extension of operational art and operational art is an extension of strategy, strategy is an extension of politics."<sup>24</sup> Similarly, reason permeates the entire level of war. Current US Army doctrine describes the translation of national strategy into strategic end-states with further translation into campaign plans. These campaign

plans tie strategic end-states into achievable military missions. Finally the commander issues his intent so that his subordinates will understand the "purpose" (read reason) of the mission.<sup>25</sup>

The respective services teach underlying principles that define policy for a service as well. This is the definition of doctrine.<sup>26</sup> This concept of reason is beyond some formal declaration of purpose. Reason also governs an army's action in battles and engagements. The new Army manual FM 71-123 codifies the "how-to" fight of modern heavy forces.<sup>27</sup> What the manual is providing is reason on how to deploy forces, recommendations for the makeup of task organized forces and sequencing for the conduct of operations. When a division begins a river crossing operations with suppression fires across to the enemy's side of the river to isolate the bridgehead, there is a reason. Logic, another form of reason, would intuitively point to this requirement but more importantly US Army doctrine instructs us that this is a logical step in the sequence of actions.<sup>28</sup>

When Congress authorizes three light divisions, it is providing reason for the force structure that is available for the next conflict. If Congress only authorizes heavy divisions, then one has a reason, however inappropriate, for using an armored division in operations other than war. If a tyrannical leader has a desire to conquer a neighboring country then a reason for military action exists.

Some would feel that many actions of war seem to be beyond the scope of reason. There are a myriad of examples throughout history in which the destruction and carnage appeared to defy all reason. But reason is a matter of perspective. Clausewitz tells us:

"Policy, of course, is nothing in itself; it is simply a trustee for all the interests against other states[internal administration, spiritual values, etc.] That it can err, subserve the ambitions, private interests, and vanity of those in power, is neither here nor there...We can only treat policy as a representative of all the interests of the community."<sup>29</sup>

The message is that actions by other countries and forces on the battlefield do not have to reflect logic, they are merely a reflection of policy. Those actions that

appear illogical have a basis in reason. Those who can discern and understand those underlying reasons will have a distinct advantage over his adversary.

Sun Tzu tells us; "Know your enemy and know yourself, in a hundred battles you will never be in peril."<sup>30</sup> Knowing your enemy is an all encompassing task. You must know his dispositions, his aims, his strengths and his weaknesses. More importantly you must know why he is fighting. The reasons may vary from the strategic to the tactical level but they are discernible.

"...Just as individuals are conditioned by the environment in which they grow up, so are governments conditioned by that same environment, and reflect, as well as reflect upon, national characteristics. The characteristics are shaped by geography, climate, historical experiences, and religious beliefs, which in turn determine economic circumstances, national prejudices, ideals or ideologies."<sup>31</sup>

Each of these factors listed by C. N. Donnelly in his book, Red Banner, plays a role in determining why and how a nation develops and executes strategic policy. They also determine characteristics that guide how a military force fights. As the list indicates, the factors are numerous and encompass a wide array of variables. However complex the variables and the forces involved in effecting the reason for nation's action, they are real.

#### B. Passion

A second force that plays a constant role in the conduct of war is passion, emotion and violence that Clausewitz assigned mainly to the people. But the people are not the sole possessors of passion. To assert that only the masses of people are the embodiment of the influence of passion on warfare is to ignore a key force that effects the functioning of both the government and the army.

Government bureaucracy tends to mitigate momentary flashes of passion by the leadership prior to causing rash actions on the battlefield. But the conduct of the war is still dramatically affected by passions within the government. Clausewitz tells us that, "War is not a senseless passion." The sense comes from government controls that establish policy for the war. This policy determines the level at which the government is willing to expend resources and to otherwise

delineate the magnitude and duration of the war.<sup>32</sup> History is replete with examples where governments continued their war efforts beyond reason for the sake of hope, pride, fear and obstinance. All of these emotions fall under the force of passion.

Clausewitz tells us that, "War and its forms result from ideas, emotions and conditions prevailing at the time."<sup>33</sup> The government frames and presents those ideas at the national level. FMFM 1 states that emotions shape war and that, "Moral forces exert a greater influence on the nature and outcome of war than do physical."<sup>34</sup> These forces by definition are also at play at the national level.

Passion often drives and sweeps government policy along paths of least resistance. Clausewitz tells us that ambition and vanity can drive policy. Passion includes these two emotions.<sup>35</sup> That the leaders of a country are prone to natural passions is almost self evident. These leaders are people who are just as susceptible to patriotism, fear, aggression and ambition as those who follow them. In many cases politicians may be more susceptible to passions due to their requirement to rally national support for governmental action which is the basis of politics.

Often this rallying of support requires the politicians to evoke emotions to develop a national fervor that will support a war. As the national fervor builds, the government often begins to absorb and amplify its own propaganda. The national leaders begin believing that their depiction of the enemy as the devil incarnate is reality. The ramifications is that "The weight of war-time propaganda and national emotion makes a people see war as simply a fight between good and evil..."<sup>36</sup> With good on their side, a higher moral calling, the government embarks on war to correct evil.

So then passion can drive the derivation and implementation of policy. It also directly impacts success on the battlefield. The role of morale and emotions in war is the key ingredient to victory and failure. Clausewitz tells us the loss of material is simply a symptom of defeat. The true decisive factor rests with morale.<sup>37</sup> Sun Tzu, writing two and a half millennia before Clausewitz stated that there are five fundamental factors involved in war with the first being moral. It is

the moral forces that cause men to follow their leaders in battle at the risk of death.<sup>38</sup>

Since moral forces in the case of Sun Tzu and passion, in the case of Clausewitz is so critical to military operations, it must manifest itself in modern fighting forces as well. Charles W. Sydnor, in Soldiers of Destruction, describes it as:

"The presence of shared assumptions and beliefs, commonly accepted norms, and unquestioned general values enabled large numbers of people, despite individual ambitions, dislikes, and agreements, to work together in common purpose toward definite goals."<sup>39</sup>

It is disturbing to quote a reference about an organization whose historical actions are repugnant to our values. But the theme present throughout the description of the SSTK Division of the inculcated discipline, ability to fight and cohesion define values that we seek in our army. FM 100-5 instructs our military to demand from our soldiers "mental and physical toughness and close-knit teamwork."<sup>40</sup>

In that same section FM 100-5 goes on to discuss how good discipline will foster adherence to land warfare and rules of engagement. Yet the same type of discipline becomes a tool used for atrocities if not tempered with the right kind of reason or policy which in the end guide the efforts of men in combat.

Cohesion and esprit de corps are two terms which describe the channeling of emotions for military units. Cohesion denotes solidarity, a feeling of belonging normally associated with shared experiences. Esprit de corps denotes unit pride and results in a common purpose whereby member attempt to perform up to unit expectations. The former usually occurs at the small unit level with the latter at a higher unit level.<sup>41</sup> Lord Moran in Anatomy of Courage, describes esprit de corps as a "source of strength, their abiding faith, it was the last of all their creeds that in historical times have steeled men against death."<sup>42</sup>

Cohesion and esprit de corps then become the rallying force for men in battle. Historically the army inculcates the force with "morale-building factors such as training (which build self-confidence), general adaptation to army life and discipline, and identification with a given group."<sup>43</sup> It seeks to place boundaries

that can funnel the emotions and passions of the fighting force to a common purpose

We see then that the passion component of the trinity plays a role in actions of the government and army as well as the people. As a dominant tendency of the trinity, it has influence on each of the other tendencies and on the trinity as a whole. Simply because Clausewitz assigned the tendency "mainly" to the people its influence on the government and the people is far reaching.

### C. Chance

Clausewitz assigns the dominant tendency of chance to the entity of the army. The environment that the army must conduct its business in is so complex that the realm of chance seems appropriate for the army. In recent years the US Army has attempted to codify the many concerns and events that an army faces in battle. In FM 101-5, Staff Organization and Operations, there are over 103 references to Army manuals, pamphlets and regulations; many of which are series of books. There is an additional reference list to over 80 standardization agreements (STANAG).<sup>44</sup>

This exhaustive list is not all inclusive of the reams of doctrine required to teach a modern army to function on the battlefield. Among nine principles of war, five army tenets, six logistics functions, the seven battlefield operating systems and the offensive and defensive framework, the amount of minutia to be mastered is endless.<sup>45</sup> As Jomini reminds us, "War is a great drama, in which a thousand physical or moral causes operate more or less powerfully, and which cannot be reduced to mathematical calculations."<sup>46</sup>

Sun Tzu included five fundamental factors that effect warfare. They include moral, weather, terrain, command and doctrine.<sup>47</sup> Each of these factors has in and of themselves endless permutations. Taken as a whole they can overwhelm a student in their complexity. Even more humbling is the realization that the reality of the complexity can soon overwhelm an army's effort to conduct operations.

Arguably the most definitive impact on chance is the role of the enemy. The enemy is simultaneously attempting to compel us to do his will while we likewise go about our business. "The enemy is an active force that reacts, but not

always in the most likely way, not always, even, in ways most advantageous to himself."<sup>48</sup> This is to imply that the enemy is unpredictable in his actions. This unpredictability leads directly to probability and the requirement for any military operation to accept risk. Any plan that assumes a particular enemy action automatically assumes a level of risk which is the essence of chance.

Does the realm of chance only play in the physical realm? Clausewitz states, "The spiritual and moral qualities of an Army, general or government, the temper of the population of the theater of war, the moral effects of victory or defeat-all these vary greatly."<sup>49</sup> In this section he tells us that interwoven throughout these phenomena called war, is moral effects. The end effect are literally an infinite number of ways of producing the whole. This infinite permutations on the effects of moral forces renders a level of uncertainty to the conduct of operations that defies simple analysis.

Chance also affects reason. Government, the purview of the Clausewitzian mantle of reason, is subject to the intricacies of chance. A study on the causes of civil disasters revealed that, "Disaster-provoking events tend to accumulate because they have been overlooked or misinterpreted as a result of false assumptions, poor communications, cultural lag and misplaced optimism."<sup>50</sup> The endless factors involved in most policy decisions renders the likelihood of errors in judgement very likely.

It should be remembered that governments, during peace and when at war, are made up of men. "Men operate in environments in which events are only partly the result of controlled decisions taken by the person 'in charge.'"<sup>51</sup> We have already established that governments and, hence, reason can be effected by passion. However, since government functions on the basis of bureaucracy and consensus building, its mode of operation tend to mitigate wild and impetuous effects of passion and chance. This mitigating effect is why Clausewitz assigned the tendency of reason to the government.

The organizational design of government, a function of reason, doctrine and policy, provides a reasoned investigation of situations to ensure proper decisions are made. These decisions should be based on sound reason. Invariably,



the development of organizations leads to the development of information and the requisite creation of information management through statistics. "Statistics, even when accurate, can never substitute for an in-depth knowledge of an environment."<sup>52</sup> The result is that the government takes data, compiles statistics and then makes an hypothesis as to what the policy should be. The inherent uncertainty in the data gives rise to numerous errors that introduces another avenue for chance to affect policy. This data is also always changing rendering the ability to know the real situation virtually impossible. This leads to continuous efforts to update, analyze and hypothesize the direction government policy should take.

#### D. Continuum

Clausewitz's discussion of the interrelationship of the dominant tendencies is best described by the concept of the continuum. His magnet analogy alone bespeaks of continuous fields of energy that are constantly and continually overlapping and effecting one another.

"Policy will permeate all military operations and, in so far as their violent nature will admit, it will have a continuous influence on them...[Moral elements] constitute the spirit that permeates war as a whole, and at its early stage they establish a close affinity with the will that moves and leads the whole mass of force, practically merging with it, since the will is itself a moral quantity...No other human activity (war) is so continuously or universally bound up with chance."<sup>53</sup>

These three quotations describe phenomena that are inseparable. Each individually describes war and can therefore be thought of in isolation for pedantic discussions. Yet, Their innate qualities indicate that they also must be inseparable from the whole concept of war. Hence, we come to the defining term known as the trinity. These three tendencies while separate permeates every aspect of war.

By extension then, when one discusses the role of policy in war, one must also discuss the effect of passion and chance on policy. Similarly, any effort to explain the role of chance in the real world must be tempered by a recognition that passion and reason will either confound or expand the role of chance.

The final point is that simply because Clausewitz assigned these dominant tendencies to the government, people and the army respectively, in no way implies the negation of the underlying interrelationship. They do not act in isolation, but continuously affect, modify and influence one another. It is this interrelationship that provides us with an understanding of the essence of war. It is this understanding of the interrelationship that can provide insight into how to both analyze and conduct war. The constituent parts of the trinity are passion, reason and chance which act on a continuum. We look now at the holistic effect of the Clausewitzian trinity.

#### E. Identity

When people identify an issue that stirs their emotions, it creates an entity that people either accept or reject. This entity can be in the form of a religious or political issue, a way of life or even a perceived injustice that needs remedy. This entity is what connects people. One can refer to this entity that connects people as an identity. That is to say that people who feel a bond to such an identity develop group traits. "With the stranger one has only certain more general qualities in common, whereas organically connected persons is based on similarity of just those specific traits which differentiates them from the merely universal."<sup>54</sup> These traits, and the accompanying acceptance to them, define what we commonly refer to as cultural characteristics that often gets lumped into ethnic groups. But ethnicity is much more broad based than just common culture: So we see that ethnicity is nothing more than an ideal or norm that people reflect upon as their identity. The basis for this identity can be race, color, religious, political or vocational.

When this central identity is sufficiently strong to call for the imposition of force to maintain, then we have conflict. When nations possess a common identity and the nations feel that this identity or the value that defines that identity is threatened then we have war.

This identity creates the focus and drives the emotions of war. If the identity is sufficiently strong, then simply destroying a nation's fighting force and even occupying the country will not assure victory. This remaining force that

continues to supply resistance is the will of the nation.<sup>55</sup> One must defeat this will to truly defeat one's opponent. This is why even though the United States physically occupied South Vietnam and defeated the Viet Cong virtually every time they met on the battlefield, we still lost the war. The will of the Viet Cong to continue the struggle had not been broken. The Viet Cong refused to adopt as their identity the system that the United States was supporting in South Vietnam. Instead, they adopted an identity based on a united Vietnam and was willing to suffer excruciating losses and deprivations to obtain it. This identity was the true source of their national will; not communism, Soviet aid or the propagation of the domino theory.

This identity is always present in war. It is why the elusive absolute war is unattainable. Clausewitz recognized that this force would always play a central role in determining both the type and duration of war.

"Since war is not an act of senseless passion but is controlled by its political object, the value of this object must determine the sacrifices to be made for it in magnitude and also in duration. Once the expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow."<sup>56</sup>

Note that in Clausewitz's discussion that the political object he refers to is analogous to a central guiding identity. If one considers the true essence of his trinity we see that this political object is the reason that a nation fights. This reason determines the amount of passion and resources that a nation will expend to support that political object. It determines the will of the nation. It then becomes evident that the will is an integral target of war. If an adversary can separate a nation's passion and emotion from the reason that it has stated it is fighting, then victory is at hand.

Just recently in Haiti we saw that a few armed thugs with pistols could turn away a ship load of several hundred soldiers because the threat of violence had separated the reason for entering the country from the emotions that sent them. The political object was based on aid and the passion that supported that deployment was based on the perceived good that would come from that aid. The threat of violence, however insignificant, had redefined the conditions. The will of

the nation was immediately refocused to nonsupport and the troops withdrew. The adversaries in Haiti had attacked the will of the nation without firing a shot.

This identity also runs deeper than just at the national level. It permeates warfare from strategic to the tactical level. At the lowest level, we find it in cohesion and esprit de corps. These traits form the lowest common denominator that cause men to fight. Cohesion can be as simple as two men in a fox hole who fight to survive or it may be a well-trained tank crew who continues to function as a team because they believe in each other. One of the most often cited reason for desertion on the battlefield of individual soldiers was a "lack of morale-building factors such as training...general adaptation to army life and discipline, and identification with a given group."<sup>57</sup> The individual soldier must feel an identification with the unit he is fighting with. Both of these items of identification can and have been targets for war, battles and engagement.

Sun Tzu stated that subduing the enemy without battle is better than a hundred victories in battle.<sup>58</sup> He was referring to attacking the identity, the reason and the strategy that forces act upon in battle. If he is defeated before the first shots are fired then you are guaranteed victory. We observed this very phenomenon in Haiti. Sun Tzu's kernel of truth that a surrounded enemy should be left a way of escape also accounts for the identity of the enemy.<sup>59</sup> A surrounded enemy knows that the only hope for victory is to invoke unmitigated violence for survival. Survival becomes their identity and this perceived reality produces emotion based actions that will invariably result in unwanted death and destruction for both sides. Sun Tzu would seek to deny this identity from the enemy by giving him the impression that a way of escape still existed.

The Clausewitzian trinity, composed of three fundamental elements, acts in a continuum through all levels of warfare and results in an identity. For the army the identity resides in cohesion and unit pride. In the people it resides in their culture and patriotism. In the government it resides in the perceived mandate of the people. If the identity is threatened or a value embodied in that identity is threatened then conflict arises and in the case of nation-states, this conflict is war. We must now examine the trinity holistically.

#### IV THE TRINITY EXPOSED

To understand Clausewitz's trinity we must return to his basic definition and analogy that he uses to couch his argument. Let us look at his context in total:

"War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case. As a total phenomenon its *dominant tendencies* (italics added) always make war a paradoxical trinity--composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which is to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an element of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone."<sup>60</sup>

From this presentation he then assigns the three of the tendencies "mainly" to a particular societal entity, namely the violence of people, chance to the army and reason to the government.

The qualifier "mainly" is very significant. This word obviously implies that a particular societal entity does not hold a patent on any one of the tendencies. These entities, while used throughout the remainder of his work in various forms, provide a framework for discussion.<sup>61</sup> While the entities can exist theoretically in isolation, each entity does possess a measure of the other tendencies in reality. It is the violence, chance and reason tendencies that are important in his theoretical construct and not the people, army and government. The tendencies are the basic constituent parts whose interaction form the entity that we know as war.

He refers to the dominant tendencies as a trinity. If one looks up the term in the dictionary one finds the following: "The state or condition of being three. Any three parts in union."<sup>62</sup> Historically and culturally the term has its roots in the Christian reference to the deity of God. This deity is also a trinity. It consists of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.<sup>63</sup> Each of these identities is a separate entity that performs specific functions according to theology, yet they are inseparable from one another. To ignore one, or to give one more importance than the other is to lose the true meaning of God. God cannot exist if the three trinity elements in their separate being do not make the construct of the one almighty God.

In this same section Clausewitz issues a warning that any, "Theory that ignores any one of them [the dominant tendencies composed of passion, reason and chance] or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would so conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless."<sup>64</sup> Again, this ties directly to his use of the concept of the trinity where one component of the trinity cannot exist in isolation. We see then that a discussion of the causes of conflict should not seek to pit the government, army and the people against one another. Instead we should reflect on the forces that cause changes in reason, passion and the role of chance in the formulation of policy and actions. These changes can occur in the government, in the army, in the people or in a combination of all three. According to Clausewitz, any theory of war must properly address the existence of the three components and also address the interaction of these components.

Clausewitz likens the interaction of the tendencies to three magnets. This physical analogy is worthy of further review. The magnets are constantly influencing one another. The movement of any one magnet results in a shift in relative magnetic field strength that directly interacts with the magnetic field of any other nearby magnet. These magnetic fields are continuous and no matter how small induce a force on any other magnetic. We observe an even more pronounced effect when "an object *is* suspended among three magnets."<sup>65</sup> Any shift in the magnets will force the object out of equilibrium and it will succumb to gravity.

Notice it is the theory that requires balancing and not the elements of the trinity. Careful reflection on the analogy reveals that if one anchors the three magnets, one can determine the induced magnetic field among the three magnets. Once measured and properly defined, then one can suspend a known theory with the right properties among the three magnets. If, however, the magnets move freely or are ill defined to begin with, then the induced magnetic field among the three is never known or constant but always fluctuating. Any theory placed in suspension between the magnets will not maintain equilibrium and come crashing to the ground.

The magnet analogy now presents us with a striking contradiction between the school house teachings and the true meaning of Clausewitz's theoretical construct. Notice in Barbero's schematic, (see Figure 1), tension holds the elements of the trinity in physical balance with one another.<sup>66</sup> Clausewitz states that there is no arbitrary relationship between the elements of the trinity. The elements of the trinity are never in balance. His item of interest that requires balancing is theory.

Barbero proceeded to analyze the Iraq-Iran war using the school-house construct of Clausewitz's trinity. This use of the construct involved analyzing the relative strength of the government, people and army. According to Barbero, the relative domination of each entity led each to change the strategic course of the war in the two respective countries.<sup>67</sup> This process sought to isolate the three corners of the triangle and then proceeded to quantify the effects of each component on the prosecution of the war.

While this process provided Barbero a mode of discussion for his argument it was contradictory to Clausewitz's warning. By isolating and discussing the government's action in terms of policy alone, he failed to analyze the effect of passion and chance on the construct of government policy. By addressing the degraded relative strength of the army as a consequence of military purges of the army leadership, he failed to address the emotional factors that could force poor performance from the military leadership on the battlefield.<sup>68</sup> With poor or ineffectual leadership the army had to resort to the only viable military means left: human waves driven by religious fanaticism.

In order to use Clausewitz's trinity to evaluate actions in war, one must address how the constituent elements of the trinity are at play. The constituent elements interact. A change in policy effects the conduct of military operations. A change in the people's perception of the war changes the conduct of military operations. More importantly, a change in military operations can and usually does effect government policy and the people's perception of the war. The most critical failure of Barbero's analysis is the lack of consideration given to the effect of the elements of the trinity within each entity, namely the people, government

and the army. A change in policy at the governmental level can have dramatic impact on the passion, reason and chance that play on the army. This complex interaction of passion, reason and chance is a component part of each of the entities that Clausewitz assigned to each respective dominant tendency. Specifically, while reason is the dominant tendency of government, passion and chance are also influencing the government. Similarly, while chance is the dominant tendency associated with the army, reason and passion are still an integral part of the army's actions. Finally, while passion is the dominant tendency of the people, they still act on perceived reason and on the play of chance that changes circumstances and provides the framework for their actions. We see a more representative portrayal of Clausewitz's trinity in Figure 6.

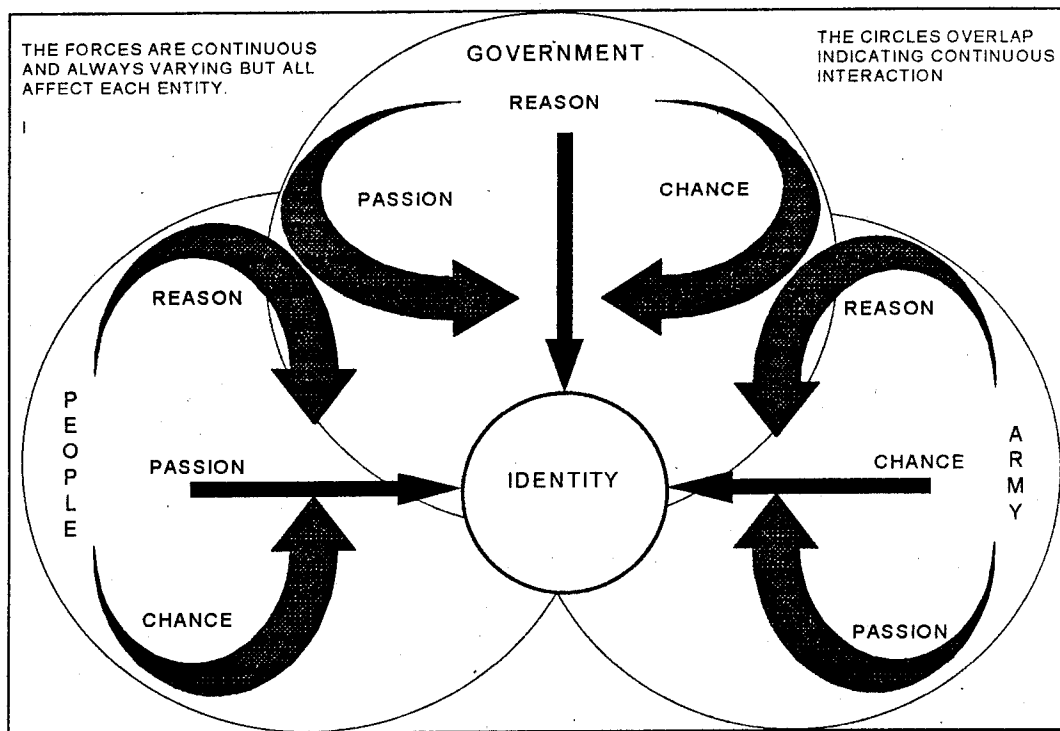


Figure 6. The complex interaction of the trinity.

Each entity may have an identity that is incompatible with the other two. If the government produces a policy that the people agree and identify with and the



military is willing and able to support it, then a common identity exists that produces a comprehensive national effort to achieve the stated political objective. Notice in Figure 6 that with the creation of a common national identity, reason for the people and the army is influenced by the reason supplied by government. The nation develops a coherent national will. If the people or the military act on reason that is at variance with the government's policy, then internal national conflict with the government will occur.

Referring back to the school house example of an insurgency, one would find that pitting the people against the government and the army is misleading. Instead a group of people accept an identity that is contrary to the government's. This group forms their own policy making body that develops policy, direction and reason for their actions. If the group feels strongly enough about their grievance with the government, they arm themselves for paramilitary actions. In this instance we find a group within the nation that now has the influences of passion, reason and chance that are in direct conflict with the national identity that also is influenced by perhaps different passions, reasons and chance. This same phenomenon is at play in the case of coup d'état, revolution and civil war. The people, army and government are not pitted against one another, but elements of each accept an identity that produces enough passion and reason to resort to armed conflict.

This interaction among the dominant tendencies of the trinity occurs within each individual entity that Clausewitz assigns to the tendencies. In order to evaluate the conduct of military operations we must consider more than chance. Reason and passion are critical components that produce undeniable forces that interact not only within the military but also with both the government and people. These three tendencies form a complex weave of circumstances whose interaction provides the thread that links seemingly isolated battlefield events with actions in the government and among the people. We are now ready to evaluate a division attack.

## V THE TRINITY'S AFFECT ON THE ATTACK

We examined the trinity to determine the forces acting in war. The underlying essence of warfare is an amalgamation of three forces composed of passion, reason and chance. The three forces influence each other continuously and effect actions at all levels of warfare. Even though each force is a separate entity, an explanation of warfare that does not consider all three is lacking and of little use. More importantly, even when discussing the particulars of each individual force in a given situation, the nature of war is such that the interaction of each of the other two forces must drive the analysis. Specifically, attempting to explain the failure of an attack based on the role of chance alone is futile. Reason and passion are critical components to establishing the conditions for the play of chance.

In our original scenario we described a division attempt to conduct a river crossing operation that resulted in failure. An analysis of such an event can provide concrete examples of how the interaction of the Clausewitzian trinity influences the execution of tactical missions. The postulated events provide a vehicle for exposing the possible influences that lead to and are a product of events that are driven by interacting forces.

### A. The Failure of Reason.

Reason acts on the military in various ways. National strategic policy, operational design and tactical missions use Clausewitz's reason as their basis. The famous Bridge Too Far scenario is a classic case of a military mission that went awry. Pressure from the government to accelerate success on the battle front caused the adoption of a very high risk military mission.

This pressure can arise from ambition of the government leaders, from the people of the nation who have grown weary of war and from military leaders who desire their place in history from a glorious victory. Notice that each of these reasons for an ill-fated military operation derives from the passions of the participants involved.

To complicate the scenario even further, suppose a major television station back home had shown images of soldiers relaxing in rest and relaxation camps followed by harsh editorials concerning the lack of action on the front. This news documentary caught the government unprepared for the peoples demands for action. The immediate response from the government to the commander in the field would be to demand an attack across the river. In this particular scenario we have an excellent example of the interwoven moral factors associated with passion and the play of chance effecting the reason for the river crossing operations.

The role of reason on the tactical conduct of the mission also is a concern. For the US Army, doctrine is an authoritative, fundamental set of principles designed to guide the actions of commanders, staffs and units in the conduct of military operations.<sup>69</sup> Writers of doctrine, especially during peacetime, strive to describe how the Army will fight its future wars. Writers of doctrine consider existing technology, future likely enemies and a best guess of the environment of future war. Doctrine by its nature is based on generic scenarios and uncertain enemies. Because of the generic nature of the scenarios, writers of doctrine seldom consider the politico-military realities that invariably effect the execution of tactical operations.<sup>70</sup> Without a real enemy, the doctrine writers must envision the threat and hope that they are not too wrong. Changes in technological, political and military realties can render doctrine useless.

Changes in doctrine at the commencement of hostilities always occur. Lessons learned on the battlefield get translated into new ways of conducting operations resulting in new doctrine. "In a certain sense, war through the ages has been a battle of doctrines. The really decisive successes have come to those who adapted a new doctrinal concept to which their enemies were able to respond."<sup>71</sup>

In our scenario, doctrine could cause mission failure. Current engineer doctrine removed bridging assets from divisions and placed them at the corps level.<sup>72</sup> With the requirement for the division to conduct the river crossing, the corps sends down a bridging unit. The new unit's unfamiliarity with the division's command, control and reporting procedures could result in poor integration of the

engineer assets into the scheme of maneuver. This change in reason, in the form of unit organization and doctrine, could lead to total mission failure.

#### B. The Failure of Passion

Passion, violence and the accompanying moral factors are what drive men to both action and inaction. It provides the purpose for a military operation. Properly used, it can be a major combat multiplier, if ignored it can be the root cause for failure. A search for the famous hub of all power can usually begin with passion. Colonel John A. Warden tells us:

"Nobody gives up everything until further resistance becomes obviously either futile or physically impossible. The degree of pain a state [or military unit] will endure is related to what it is asked to give up. The intensity of the fight is established by the side that has the greatest interest and will."<sup>73</sup>

Sir Julian Corbett, in his discussion of limited war and unlimited war, recognized that the delineation is solely based on the perceived relative importance of the conflict to the parties involved. It is not a product of the relative military strength but a product of the strength a belligerent is willing to apply. Limitation on the use of force relies not only on a nation's desire to achieve a political object but on the willingness of the enemy to abandon his. These causes, derived from moral forces, guide the actions of belligerents in combat.<sup>74</sup>

The enemy has military objectives, reason for actions and convictions that drive him into combat just as we do. It is never a matter of simply identifying the military objective and compelling your enemy to do your will. "Because warfare is a battle of two or more belligerents, the decision rests not only on one's ability to coerce your enemy but also on the enemy's willingness to be coerced."<sup>75</sup> If he is more willing to suffer deprivation, pain and casualties then we are at a distinct disadvantage. The Vietnam war is a classic example of where a fighting force with less men, less material and far inferior technology was willing to pay a much higher price in suffering and deprivation to meet their military objectives.

This belief in the fight, this willingness to sacrifice travels down to the individual soldier. At this level the importance of geopolitical strategy and aims is virtually non-existent. While patriotism and a call to arms may rally individuals

into the service, when bullets are flying these thoughts soon evaporate. It is at this point that training, cohesion, esprit and the sheer fight for survival will take over. Reinforcement of these elements with strong beliefs in the cause for which one is fighting establishes conditions for success.

So now we come back to our mythical division's river crossing operation. As the lead brigades approached the river the enemy proceeded to kill civilians on their side of the river and to dump the bodies into the river. The enemy placed multiple rocket launchers in the square of a renowned religious monastery and rained artillery on the US forces. Political constraints would not allow US indirect fire or area weapons to return fires into the monastery. The enemy had bypassed the lead brigades 30 km north and conducted a motorized battalion raid against the division support area. The division headquarters suffered forty percent casualties from an artillery barrage resulting in the destruction of the command and control net.

All of these events influenced in varying degrees the psychology of the division. The lead soldiers on the river's edge were in shock from the carnage they observed with the civilian casualties. In this scenario we see that "there is a class of war where one or both of the belligerents consider that its costs in blood and treasure is not worth it."<sup>76</sup> The senseless civilian slaughter was so repulsive that the soldiers withdrew from the river to persuade the enemy to stop killing civilians.

The ability of the enemy to use artillery with impunity had a disastrous effect on morale as well. The force as a whole began to question the political constraints placed upon them. This political decision directly impacted the will of the army to fight because as S.L.A. Marshal said:

"Will does not operate in a vacuum. It cannot be imposed successfully if it runs counter to reason.... The limits for the commander in battle are defined by the general circumstances. What he asks of his men must be consistent with the possibilities of the situation."<sup>77</sup>

The political constraints imposed a policy on the mission that should have driven planning. Intelligence should have identified likely locations of enemy artillery and

the situation may have driven the requirement for an air assault force into the monastery to engage the artillery. In this particular scenario we see that political strategic guidance directly affected the tactical situation and should have driven actions of the tactical force. To simply complain about political constraints and use them as excuses for mission failure is inappropriate. The interwoven effects of policy and tactical decisions must be understood in context with a complete METT-T analysis.

An enemy force in the rear can instantaneously cause a rout. The effect of an enemy force roving in the rear is even more dramatic when the front line troops are engaged. The combination of psychological and physical stress of the engagement produces a volatile situation. The situation in the rear provides a spark of uncertainty which could induce panic among the most disciplined troops.<sup>78</sup> The rumor mill immediately begins to circulate about the assault on the division support area. The information concerning the true situation is non-existent due to the destruction of the division tactical command. The lack of accurate information convinces the troops the enemy has overrun the division and panic sets in. "Information is the soul of morale in combat and the balancing force in successful tactics."<sup>79</sup> The division ceases to maintain a will to execute the mission because of panic over the enemy force in the rear.

As mentioned, the catalyst for the panic was a lack of information caused by the attack on the division headquarters. The loss of centralized control on the surface appears to be an assault on reason but in reality effects all elements of the trinity. "Without command, a military organization is nothing but a rabble, a chicken with its head cut off."<sup>80</sup> The essence of command is to provide purpose and reason for action for subordinate units. But the loss of information amplifies uncertainty for the subordinate units to epic proportions. Small, insignificant events lose their context and can quickly render doubt and fear as the dominant characteristics that guide a unit's action. The loss of the command element results in a lack of reason, an increase in uncertainty and uncontrollable emotions.

The loss of command also inflicts an intense feeling of isolation on subordinate units. "Man is a gregarious animal. He wants company."<sup>81</sup> He must

know that he is being supported by others and that he has not been abandoned on the battlefield. Lack of information, direction and guidance from higher headquarters will inflict severe emotions of isolation and fear. In this scenario it can lead directly to failure.

### C. The Failure of Chance

Chance and uncertainty are an integral part of army operations. The complexities of warfare are such that no one can grasp all the events that control, influence and affect any army's actions. The advent of new and sophisticated technology has seldom reduced the requirement for the planning and conduct of warfare. On the contrary, such new technologies usually simply add to the range of information and control that a military must master.

A cavalry division in the 1800's had to understand bugle and flag signals, some basic tactics and how to obtain forage for their men and animals. A modern heavy division has a wide array of communications, maintenance, arming, fueling, moving, sustaining and personnel requirements whose technical applications require professional level schooling to implement. Combined with the aspects of sustaining the force is complex combined arms and coalition warfare with more moving parts than imaginable. Finally, assuming an army can master the knowledge of itself, the potential enemies of the world comprise a variety of cultures, norms and military capabilities that poses almost insurmountable problems in determining which threat the army will prepare to meet.

Each of the factors listed above produces an endless array of variables. The complex interaction of the variables produces a necessary environment of chaos and uncertainty. To handle this inherent array of variables we come back to doctrine and policy. Policy and doctrine determines the type of organization that will attempt to arrange, analyze and react to the variables of combat. The multitude of variables forms chaos that only organizational structure can control.<sup>82</sup>

Organization, and its relationship to doctrine, effects not only chance but passion and reason. "Order or disorder depends on organization; courage or cowardice on circumstances; strength or weaknesses on disposition."<sup>83</sup> Doctrine describes how the army thinks about fighting and how it goes about organizing for

combat given the resources allocated by policy.<sup>84</sup> The mitigation of chance through sound doctrine, training and preparation is the primary means armies use to grapple with uncertainty and chance.

The uncertainties associated with weather, for example, can only be dealt with by instituting a large bureaucracy and infrastructure in the form of the National Weather Bureau. This bureau is supported by a vast array of satellites, telecommunications and complex computer facilities. The bureau uses this infrastructure to take large amounts of meteorological data, compile it and then analyze it to develop trends. Even after training, the sheer volume of variables and data can lead to the wrong forecast. The same applies to the division in the attack.

The division in the attack must correctly assess its own capability, the effects of terrain, weather, time available to execute the mission and the capability of the enemy. Each of these factors is a science in and of itself just to have the knowledge to analyze them properly. In addition, they are not constants but variables. They are constantly changing implying they are indeterminate except in a snapshot of time. This entire description is what makes chance and probability the purview of the army. Clausewitz described it best:

"In short, absolute, so-called mathematical, factors never find a firm basis in military calculations. From the very start there is an interplay of possibilities, good luck and bad that weaves its way throughout the length and breadth of the tapestry. In the whole range of human activities"<sup>85</sup>

To combat this uncertainty the army turns to reason in the form of doctrine and training. Familiarity with weapons systems during tough, realistic training is the best means of handling the uncertainty. "Troops are truly prepared to establish order on the battlefield only when, in the course of intelligent training, they have been forewarned of the kind of disorder they may expect there."<sup>86</sup> For our infamous division, we observe that the lead elements along the river bank were unprepared for the violence that the enemy was capable of perpetrating. The sight of the carnage was so repugnant that it overwhelmed them. They were prepared to face an enemy who would fight fair. They were not prepared to face an enemy who was willing to impose wholesale slaughter to meet their objective. The enemy



had identified this as a source of weakness in the US Army and accurately assessed its impact on our will. They modified their doctrine, their way of fighting because they felt the objective was worth the price.

Another major source of uncertainty was the failure of the division main command post to take control of the battlefield after the destruction of the division tactical command post. The uncertainty and the role of chance grew unchecked because of the lack of proper command and control. The mission, which is the final statement of reason in the form of the objective becomes overwhelmed by chance and uncertainty.

The division in the attack has a myriad of concerns that it must address. The school teaching of levels of war and the spectrum of war will do the division little if any good. What can do them good is understanding how political and strategic policy will permeate their operations down to the lowest tactical level. Recognizing this phenomenon will assist them to transition from a fictional doctrinal enemy to a living, breathing opponent who has a vote on their course of action. It will affect and perhaps even force modification in tactics.

Passion's role on the division attack is the most difficult to quantify but just as real as the availability of weapons. The best technology, equipment, training and doctrine is of no use if the soldiers do not possess a desire to fight. Similarly, the enemy bases his actions on the same type of emotion. Understanding that he determines the why, where and how he fights on his ideology, culture and beliefs would help in the preparation and execution of the attack.

Finally, chance, uncertainty and chaos are an integral part of warfare. The number of moving parts and the sheer scope of the activity render absolute complete and accurate knowledge impossible. Even with expert intelligence and even if the enemy is where you thought he would be, he will strike you while simultaneously you attempt to strike him. It is a contest. The best training, conditioning and preparation can be of no avail if the enemy finds that one "lucky" punch. If he is an inferior opponent and his emotions still drive him to fight, then reason will direct him to a course of action where he will not fight "fair."

## VI CONCLUSION

The concept of the trinity as presented by Clausewitz delineates the fundamental forces that guide actions in warfare. These forces operate in a continuum and are inseparable from one another. Passion, emotion and the moral factors of war invoke fear, panic and violence. Reason, policy and doctrine provide guidance, direction and purpose through the maze of activity associated with the execution of warfare. Chance, uncertainty and probability are inherent qualities due to the plethora of activities and variables that can influence the purpose, conduct, and passions of war.

The description of these elemental forces defies any attempt to isolate them. The manner in which they interact renders any attempt to place an arbitrary relationship among them completely useless. Such an effort will take their meaning and influence out of context.

A division in the attack must look at the entire environment that it faces in war. It is not enough to discuss military actions in terms of the level of war, in terms of the type of war, or in terms of the science of war. While each of these pedantic methods can help us in study, in reality they also defy isolation.

For the division conducting the river crossing, there are three things that will drive the actions of the operation. All three are playing both sides of the conflict.

Reason, as delineated through strategic guidance, operational theme, tactical mission and implemented through planning and doctrine provides an umbrella of control that seeks to bridle passion and chance. This same force also influences the actions of the enemy. As such it becomes a contest of whose umbrella of reason can overcome the others. "Combat provides, rather than a speculative argument, clear justifications for jettisoning old ways of fighting and the adopting of new ones."<sup>87</sup> The changing circumstances influence passion and chance to such an extent that those who can adapt and react to the changing conditions will have the marked advantage.

The commander and staff of the division must understand the play of reason for the enemy to the point that they know why they too are fighting. Once discerned properly, then it becomes a target for attack. The enemy will conduct operations to assault our reason as well. In our scenario the enemy attacked our command structure and used the monastery and civilians to inflict damage on our will to fight. This is a target that is also available for us. By understanding the role of reason as it pertains to the actions of the enemy, then we can better prepare to protect our reason and assault the enemy's.

Chance also effects both the attacking division and the enemy. Friction is a term that denotes the negative application of chance. A plan based solely on generic doctrine and not modified to the existing conditions is doomed for failure. "War is so complex that the friction can overcome the laws."<sup>88</sup> But if understood, thought over and incorporated into the plan of action, friction can both be mitigated and applied against the enemy. "Fog and friction are hindrances to one's own action, but to the extent that they can be inflicted on the enemy commander, they become allies."<sup>89</sup>

Passion is an all encompassing force influencing those who develop policy, strategy, campaign plans, operations orders and those soldiers on the battlefield who execute those orders. Planning war is an intellectual exercise that is inherently affected by the social and emotional circumstances that provoked the conflict.<sup>90</sup> This intellectual exercise is ripe with emotions that provides direction and creates its own logic. "Before embarking on modern war, a nation had to take into account a number of considerations other than purely military factors, including economics, politics, morale and culture."<sup>91</sup>

The ability to coalesce these factors into a working conceptualization is critical to those who must practice the military art. The three dominant tendencies of the trinity permeate warfare and their interactions are the true essence of warfare. Mao Tse Tung wrote about the correct subjective direction that a commander must have. His description denotes that a commander must understand those forces that shape the actions of both his unit and those of the

enemy. This subjective direction provides a guide for both passion and logic (reason).<sup>92</sup>

The study of warfare in terms of levels of war, relative intensity of war, or war versus operations other than war does little to prepare soldiers for real world situations. "...Commanders and their staff officers must learn to grasp the essence of situations, react, then shape them to...advantage on the basis of common conceptions, procedures and vocabulary."<sup>93</sup> The dominant tendencies of the trinity embody this essence. The influence of the dominant tendencies, if understood, can be foreseen, manipulated and used to advantage if one is cognizant of not only their existence but how they interact. This interaction is not some arbitrary fixed relationship that remains constant. It is a dynamic, variable force that continually produces new environments as the circumstances change.

The quest to explain human conflict is difficult at best. As military planners we must never assume a military solution, once called upon, can divorce itself from the people or the government. Too often in the recent past we have heard that once a military answer is sought, then it should be handed over to the military for execution without "tying" the military's hand with trivial political concerns and concerns about the media's influence on mom and pop back home. If we can stray a great distance from a model that separates the military from the people and the government then we can better understand our true position. Our true position is an interacting force with passion and reason. We are a product of both our people and our policies. Passion and reason should have as direct an influence on our actions as the tendency of chance for in fact the three tendencies form the unity called war.

A division in the attack will better perform its mission if it knows how policy, passion and chance will affect the execution of operations. School-house scenarios will no longer apply. Real world political constraints; a living, breathing and reacting enemy; and the effect of human passions will all compose an environment in which a military force will execute operations. A proper understanding of the complex existence and interaction of these forces that exist at warfare will aid in the execution of these operations.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, Micheal Howard and Peter Paret Ed. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 1984. p. 89.

<sup>2</sup>SRP 21-III-MQS, Military qualifications Standards III; Leader Development Manual for Majors and Lieutenant Colonels, Headquarters Department of the Army: Washington, D.C., June 1993. p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p.66.

<sup>4</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup>FM 100-5, Operations, Headquarters Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., June 1993. p. 2-1.

<sup>6</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 75.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, p. 89

<sup>8</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 89.

<sup>9</sup>Michael D. Barbero, The Iran-Iraq War of Exhustion: The Result of the Paradoxical Trinity, SAMS Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, second Term 88-89, p 41.

<sup>10</sup>Figure 2-5 were taken from class notes during classes on theory in the 1993-1994 session of the School of Advanced Military Studies.

<sup>11</sup>Michael D. Barbero, The Iran-Iraq War of Exhustion: The Result of the Paradoxical Trinity, p. 41.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. p.27.

<sup>13</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 87.

<sup>14</sup>FM 100-5, Operations, June 1993. p. 14-1.

<sup>15</sup>FM 100-5, Operations, June 1993. p. 14-3.

<sup>16</sup>Air Force Manual 1-1 Vol II, Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force, Department of the Air Force, Headquarters US Air Force, Washington D.C, March 1992. p. 31.

<sup>17</sup>FMFM 1, Warfighting, p. 3-16.

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<sup>18</sup>FM 100-5, Operations, June 1993. p. 6-1.

<sup>19</sup>John A. Warden, The Air Campaign, Planning for Combat, National Defense University Press: Fort McNair, Washington, D.C. 1988. p. 8.

<sup>20</sup>FMFM 1-1, Campaigning, Department of the Navy, Headquarters, United States Marine Corps... Washington D.C., 25 January 1990. p. 12.

<sup>21</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 226.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid p. 582.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid p. 87.

<sup>24</sup>Aleksandr A. Svechin, Strategy, ed. Kent D. Lee, Minneapolis, MN: East View Publications, 1992, p. 70.

<sup>25</sup>FM 100-5, Operations, Headquarters Department of the Army, Washington D.C. 5 May 1986. p. 6-1 to 6-6.

<sup>26</sup>Websters II New Riverside University Dictionary. p. 394

<sup>27</sup>FM 71-123, Tactics and Techniques for Combined Arms Heavy Forces: Armored Brigade, Battalion/ Task Force and Company Team. Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C. 30 September 1992. p. iii.

<sup>28</sup>FM 90-13/FMFM 7-26. River Crossing Operations, Dec 92. p. 3-3.

<sup>29</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 606.

<sup>30</sup>Sun Tzu, The Art of War, Samuel B. Griffith Ed., Oxford University Press, New York, 1963, p. 84.

<sup>31</sup>Christopher Donnelly, Red Banner, Janes Publishing Inc.: Alexandria, VA, 1988. p. 13.

<sup>32</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 92

<sup>33</sup>Ibid p. 580.

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- <sup>34</sup>FMFM 1, Warfighting, 06 March 1989. The emotions portion was taken from page 10, the direct route from page 13.
- <sup>35</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 606.
- <sup>36</sup>Geoffrey Blainey, The Causes of War, The Free Press, New York; 1988. p. 245.
- <sup>37</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 231.
- <sup>38</sup>Sun Tzu, The Art of War, p. 63-64.
- <sup>39</sup>Charles W. Sydnor, Jr., Soldiers of Destruction: The SS Death's Head Division, 1933-1945, Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 1977. p. 346.
- <sup>40</sup>FM 100-5, Operations, June 1993. p. 2-3.
- <sup>41</sup>Athony Kellet, Combat Motivation: The Behavior of Soldiers in Battle, Kluwer Publishing: Boston, MA, 1984. p. 146.
- <sup>42</sup>Lord Moran, The Anatomy of Courage, Avary publishing Group: Garden City Park, New York. 1987. p. 156.
- <sup>43</sup>Athony Kellet, Combat Motivation, p. 107.
- <sup>44</sup>FM 101-5, Staff Organization and Operations, Headquarters Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., May 1984. p. Reference 1-6.
- <sup>45</sup>Taken from an abstract of information found in FM100-5.
- <sup>46</sup>Antoine Jomini, Art of War, in Roots of Strategy, book 2. Stackpole books: Harrisburg, PA, 1987. p. 437.
- <sup>47</sup>Sun Tzu, The Art of War, p. 63.
- <sup>48</sup>Stephen P. Rosen, Winning the Next War, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 1991, p. 175.
- <sup>49</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 184.

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<sup>50</sup>Eliot A Cohen and John Gooch, Military Misfortunes, The Free Press: New York, 1990, p. 17.

<sup>51</sup>Eliot A Cohen and John Gooch, Military Misfortunes, p. 19.

<sup>52</sup>Martin Van Creveld, Command in War, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1985. p. 153.

<sup>53</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 87, p. 184 and p. 85.

<sup>54</sup>Orlando Patterson, Ethnic Chauvinism, Stein and Day: New York, 1978, p. 22.

<sup>55</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 90

<sup>56</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 92.

<sup>57</sup>Anthony Kellet, Combat Motivation, Kluwer Publishing: Boston, 1982. p. 107.

<sup>58</sup>Sun Tzu, The Art of War, p. 77.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>60</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 89.

<sup>61</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, He uses such terms as country, government, coalitions, politics, policy to illustrate the role of reason; army, commander, armed forces, fog, friction, weather, enemy to illustrate the role of chance; and will, people, violence, emotion, moral factors to illustrate the role of passion throughout the remainder of his work.

<sup>62</sup>Webster's p. 1235.

<sup>63</sup>Holy Bible, King James Version, Dominion Publishers: Chicago, 2 Cor 13-14, p. 1005. This is the only location where all three elements of the diety are mentioned in the same verse. There are several other inferences to a diety consisting of more than one component. In Genisis 1-26 God says "let us" create man, inferring that God is plural. Jesus is recorded as stating that God the Father and God the Son is the same and that the Holy Spirit which is God will guide his followers after his departure. (John 14-26; 15-26).



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<sup>64</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 89.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>66</sup>Michael D. Barbero, The Iran-Iraq War of Exhaustion: The Result of the Paradoxical Trinity, SAMS Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, second Term 88-89, p. 41.

<sup>67</sup>Michael D. Barbero, The Iran-Iraq War of Exhaustion, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid p. 14.

<sup>69</sup>FM 100-5, Operations, June 1993, p. G-3.

<sup>70</sup>Eliot A Cohen and John Gooch, Military Misfortunes, p. 239.

<sup>71</sup>John A. Warden, III, The Air Campaign, p. 59.

<sup>72</sup>FM 5-100, Engineer Combat Operations, Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C. Appendix A.

<sup>73</sup>John A. Warden, The Air Campaign, p. 131.

<sup>74</sup>Julian Corbett, Some Principles of Maritime Strategy, Naval Institute Press: Annapolis, MD, 1988. p. 58-59.

<sup>75</sup>Christopher Bellamy, The Evolution of Modern Land Warfare, Routledge: New York, 1990, p. 9.

<sup>76</sup>Julian Corbett, Some Principles of Maritime Strategy, p. 43.

<sup>77</sup>S.L.A. Marshall, Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War, Peter Smith: Gloucester, MA. 1978. p. 175.

<sup>78</sup>Christopher Bellamy, Future of Land Warfare, St Martin's Press: New York, 1987, p. 136.

<sup>79</sup>S.L.A. Marshall, Men Against Fire, 1978, p. 92.

<sup>80</sup>John A. Warden, The Air Campaign, Planning for Combat, National Defense University Press: Fort McNair, Washington, D.C. 1988, p. 51.

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<sup>81</sup>S.L.A. Marshall, Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War, Peter Smith: Gloucester, MA. 1978, p. 141.

<sup>82</sup>Donald Cranz, Understanding Change, School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS. May 1989, p. 9.

<sup>83</sup>Sun Tzu, The Art of War, p. 93.

<sup>84</sup>FM 100-5, Operations, p. 1-1,1-2.

<sup>85</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 86.

<sup>86</sup>S.L.A. Marshall, Men Against Fire, 1978, p. 181.

<sup>87</sup>Stephen P. Rosen, Winning the Next War, Innovation and the Modern Military, Cornell University Press: Ithica, NY, 1991. p. 109.

<sup>88</sup>Julian Corbett, Some Principles of Maritime Strategy, p. 7.

<sup>89</sup>John A. Warden, The Air Campaign, p. 117.

<sup>90</sup>Christopher Bellamy, The Evolution of Modern Land Warfare, Paraphrased from p. 9.

<sup>91</sup>Bruce Menning, Bayonets Before Bullets, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 1992, p. 213.

<sup>92</sup>Mao Tse Tung, Selected Writings of Mao Tse Tung, IN The Evolution of Military Thought, A699 Combat Studies Institute, US Army Command and General Staff College, FT. Leavenworth, KS, 1991. p. 238.

<sup>93</sup>Bruce Menning, Bayonets Before Bullets, 1992, p. 203.

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